Lateral

Journal of the Cultural Studies Association

Without Rethinking Colonialism and Racialization, a Sustainable Future is Not Possible

by Marina Gržinić | Issue 13.2 (Fall 2024), Political Economy and the Arts

ABSTRACT In this article, I talk about the performances of global capitalism, its relation to colonization and racialization, and the ways it hinders the well-being of vulnerable bodies. An understanding of the relation between post-colonialism and post-socialism is crucial to this discussion. I therefore start from a territory that is no longer conceivable today, namely former Eastern Europe and its post-socialism of 1990. I then proceed to discuss the relation of post-socialism to post-colonialism and capitalism. I conceptualize and discuss a diagram that illustrates the relations between the former East, the West, the North, and the South, and in particular, the relation between labour and capital and between capitalism and colonialism across these territories. I suggest that if we are to dismantle imperialism, that is, terminate capitalist colonialism, we need to rethink the racial/colonial divide and the imperial/colonial divide.

KEYWORDS decolonial, racial capitalism, settler colonialism

Departure Point

Neoliberal global capitalism, a necrocapitalist system, has been generating its surplus value through marketization and by governing death. Profit is made with entropy, with the transformation of territories into landscapes of death, with millions of people in the South treated as disposable and who will never work because their immobility and poverty are the source of capitalist wealth.

Everything is privatized, exploitation is normalized and therefore no longer needs to be done under the guise of protecting human rights.

The world is on the verge of collapse. Axelle Karera is very clear about the Anthropocene and what would follow a collapse: a redistribution of exploitation and dispossession, where the most exploited have to bear the burden and save the world. To prevent this, it is crucial to first put things back into perspective.

To this end, I want to talk here about the performances of global capitalism, its relation to colonization and racialization, and the ways it hinders the well-being of vulnerable bodies. An understanding of the relation between post-colonialism and post-socialism is crucial to this discussion. I therefore start from a territory that is no longer conceivable today, namely former Eastern Europe and its post-socialism of 1990. I then proceed to discuss the relation of post-socialism to post-colonialism and capitalism. I conceptualize and discuss a diagram that illustrates the relations between the former East, the West, the North, and the South, and in particular, the relation between labor and capital and between capitalism and colonialism across these territories. I suggest that if we are to dismantle imperialism, that is, terminate capitalist colonialism, we need to rethink the racial/colonial divide and the imperial/colonial divide.

Conditions: Post-Socialism and Post-Colonialism

Post-socialism is a condition of the whole of former Eastern Europe. It refers to a transitional moment in the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the period of post-socialism in the 1990s, former Eastern European countries were strongly pressured by the West to forget their socialist past by breaking off any relationship with socialism. During that time, we, from former-Eastern Europe, activists, intellectuals, artists, etc., witnessed processes of hyper-nationalism and

intensification of internal racialization (for example, the expulsion of Roma communities across Europe and, especially in former Eastern Europe, the massive deportation of refugees from the Middle East and Africa). The crucial question is what this meant for the former Eastern bloc, and by extension for our understanding of contemporary global politics, where post-socialism was considered to be synonymous with post-colonialism. I would like to pave the way to an answer, partly because both carry the prefix "post" and because such an equation is both problematic and false. It should not be forgotten that, although the 1990s was the decade of pretending to "embrace" multiculturalism, the twenty-first century *openly* despises the "Other." The latter is constantly produced through highly racialized mechanisms. This manifests itself in a variety of processes of hyper-discrimination. In the 1990s, multiculturalism was presented, despite good intentions, as the degustation of food and the ghettoization of minorities. It was a process that took place simultaneously with policies attached to multicultural bodies and cultural racism. This cultural racism was seen as "good" until 2001 when an unstoppable process of racialization began; the vision of "us and them" was exemplified in the post-9/11 rhetoric of the need to preserve "our White Occidental Civilization."

After the events of September 11, 2001, neoliberal capitalism further established war as a direct profit machine and death as a currency, and the (over)production of cultural products became completely subordinated to the so-called culture industry. Relying on discrimination and segregation, neoliberal capitalism has evolved at the cost of thousands of lives.

From then on, specifically positions coming from another former territory not only the former Eastern Europe, but as well from the former state of Yugoslavia (that collapsed in the 1991), understood that post-socialism is not, as is wrongly assumed, a post-colonial movement in former Eastern Europe that goes back to the ideas of socialism, but a brutal logic of violence, persecution, discrimination, and racialization in the former Eastern European space (the former Yugoslavia,

Russia, and other post-Soviet countries, etc.). In addition, in the former Eastern Bloc and former Yugoslavia, we have seen violence on an incredible scale against LGBTQI+ people: beatings, killings, and disregard for their basic human rights. We also see bodies floating in the sea every day, bodies of people trying to get to the "former" Western Europe: refugees, undocumented people from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, and people who have drowned on the coasts of, for example, Italy, Malta, Greece, and, increasingly, Libya.

While these processes of violence and racialization in the "former East" are ongoing, the "hot former West," the once "first capitalist world," remains a Christian-capitalist patriarchal colonial and antisemitic regime. The "hot" West employs processes of financialization and liberalism that go hand in hand with the inclusion of all those who were perceived as "Other" in the past, such as non-heterosexual identities (although there is still much discrimination against trans* people), into its neoliberal-necrocapitalist (albeit now largely imaginary) biopolitical matrix of power. However, this is not a new "enlightened logic" of the "former West" that is more civilized than the "former East." Because, while on the one hand, it includes white gays and lesbians and queer citizens of the Western nation-state, on the other hand, simultaneously, it produces an endless list of new "Others" in the West: migrants, refugees, Sans-Papiers, Muslims, people of color and women who come from other parts of the world and other religious backgrounds. And, of course, the practice of including LGBTQI+ communities in the West carries the risk of reproducing homonormativity, whitewashing the movement, and producing subtle new racializations.

So not only is post-socialism not post-colonialism, but on the contrary, it has paved the way for an extremely rapid hyper-neoliberalization of the entire former Eastern Europe, so that the former Eastern Europe is no longer post-socialist, but turbo-fascist-capitalist. Although the West (or the Occident) is also racist and fascist, it is nevertheless important to understand that the forms of this type of expropriation and dispossession take a different shape.

From Post-Socialism to Turbo-Fascist Capitalism

This article is the continuation of elaborations of two previous texts on a similar topic. They are both a result of a workshop setting in the former Eastern Europe, the former Yugoslavia, one in Belgrade (Serbia), the other in Prizren (Kosovo). In the first, published in the *Dversia* special issue,[1] I have addressed the historical reading of the decolonial horizon. In the late 1990s, and early 2000s, and parallel to Gayatri Spivak's text,[2] decolonial theory proposed the colonial matrix of power as a revolutionary foundation or basis for the twenty-first century. The colonial matrix of power implies a reflection on enduring processes of racialization and subjugation that emanate from colonialism and persist in a form of coloniality to this day. I have used it as an analytical tool here to discuss the relations between capitalism and socialism by looking at the collapse of socialism and the development of post-socialism in the 1990s. As I began to illustrate in the previous section, post-socialism is a path to (turbo) capitalism and is not a post-colonial discourse. Presently, we have what I call turbo-fascist capitalism throughout the post-Eastern European space.

In the second text, which takes the form of a trialogue between Tjaša Kancler, Piro Rexhepi, and myself, and which was published under the title "Decolonial Encounters and the Geopolitics of Racial Capitalism,"[3] we further developed Cedric Robinson's analytical tool of racial capitalism through a discussion of post-socialism. Post-socialism in the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, was a period of the disintegration of socialism in all sorts of ways, the privatization and monopolization of everything, and the complete subsumption of once socialist individuals of countries in the former Eastern European region (many of which are now part of the EU) into the iron neoliberal capitalist law of market and profit. This transition has led to the transformation of Eastern European bodies and identities into commodities. Whether as a source of cheap labor or as cultural stereotypes,

former Eastern Europeans were often perceived as expendable. The prevailing narrative portrayed us as initially colonized by socialist forces under socialism, only to be further commodified under capitalism, shaping our thinking and behavior accordingly. This problematic perception of former Eastern Europeans helps many post-socialist, now turbo-capitalist, nations in the former Eastern Europe embrace the local right-wing hyper-nationalist fascists and political profiteers in power. And since this all works in the "Occident," unlike in the "West," as mentioned above (not through turbo-fascism, but through postmodern fascism, hyper-individualization and the war state), the support of local predatory politics by international neoliberal politicians is not surprising. Despite all stated, this does not excuse post-socialist people from drifting into hyper-nationalism and turbo-fascism.

The events of 2001 resulted in not only turbo-fascism and hyper-nationalism but also led to important political impulses for new activism and political transnational solidarities in these geographical areas. For some strands of decolonial theory, however, the entire space of the former Eastern Europe is considered obsolete.[4] The analysis for such an explanation is paradoxically based on a Western post-structuralist semiotic reading, while completely failing to analyze turbo- and necrocapitalism in the region and its mode of reproduction.

Post-socialism is an almost infinite transition to turbo-fascist capitalism. The post-socialist state exclusively reinforces its national format and introduces as much as possible hyper-violent capitalist relations: it is violence carried out by the state and its apparatuses to naturalize racist labor. To understand these relations between the former East and the West, North, and the South, colonialism and fascism, I decided to conceptualize the diagram below. Everything that follows as elaboration is closely related to this diagram. The explanation goes back and forth explaining its constitutional parts.

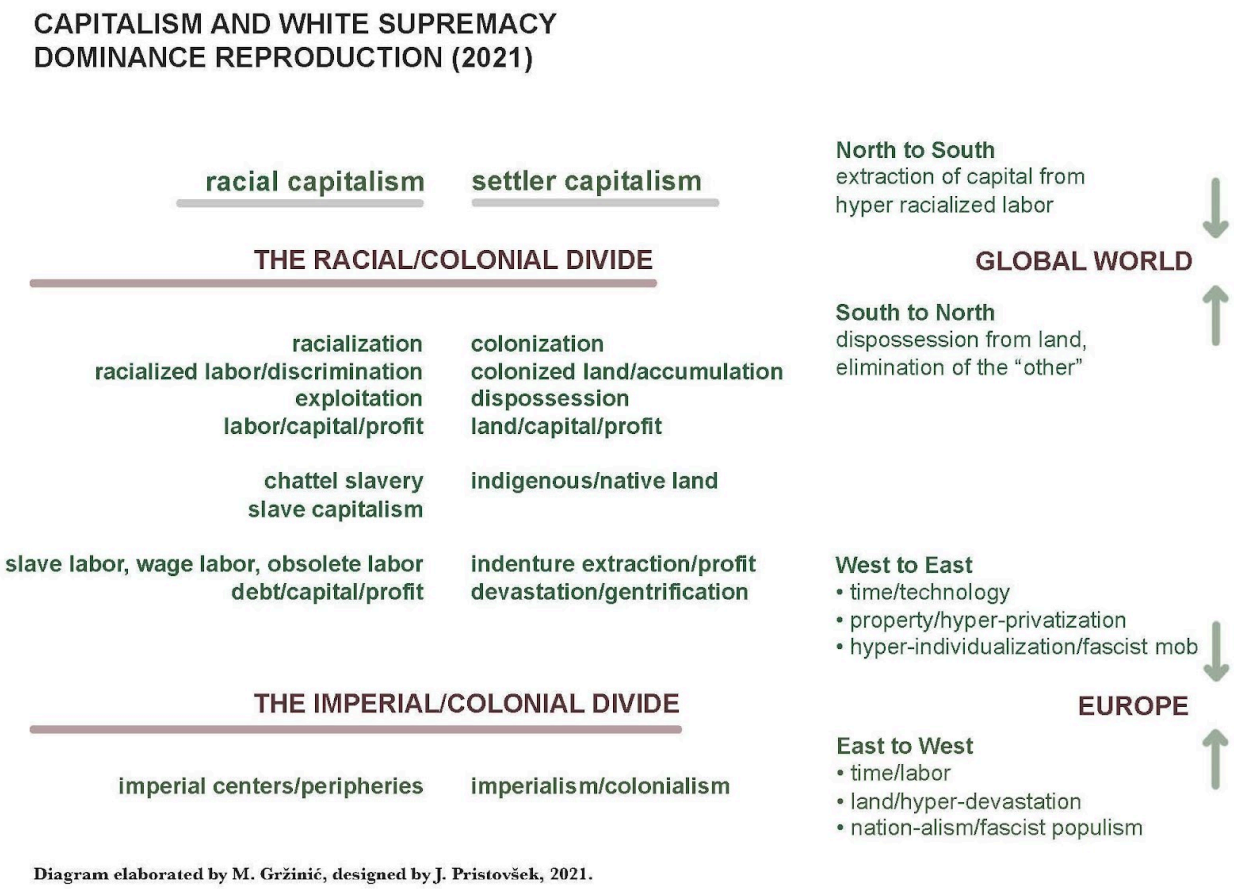

Figure 1. "Capitalism and White Supremacy: Dominance Reproduction," 2021; designed by Jovita Pristovšek based on the structure elaborated by Marina Gržinić.

This diagram summarizes the main points of the passages I have identified above. It frames racialization, dehumanization, and othering through the study of the capitalist system of reproduction, which was fully implemented throughout former Eastern Europe, and finally through the global necrocapitalist world. It allows for exploring racialized (re)production, the connection between labor and capital, and the functioning of capitalism as the other side of colonialism (or vice versa). I will not only enter the analysis semiotically but consider labor and its forms, enslaved labour, wage labour, and disposable labor will be key components of my analysis. To explain the relationship between capitalism, colonialism, racialization, and the former Eastern Europe, it is important to start with a discussion of primitive accumulation and its relation to capitalism.

Primitive Accumulation and Capitalism

In “On Race, Violence, and So-called Primitive Accumulation,” Nikhil Pal Singh argues that one of the biggest problems in understanding the place of colonialism and violent racialization and enslavement within capitalism is the separation of the pre-phase of capitalism, named primitive accumulation, and what is to come and referred to as “proper” capitalism.[5] In this pre-phase, Marx registers the violence, the hyper-violence, necessary to form super-exploited people under slavery, which will then figure as only a pre-stage of “proper” capitalism and its development. As Singh suggests, the “enduring historical and theoretical challenge posed by this sketch revolves around how to interpret the temporal and conceptual cleavage”[6]— the split between the primitive accumulation of capital and the ordinary accumulation of capital in what we might call “real” or “developed” or “proper” capitalism.

As early as 1983, in his seminal book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Robinson[7] challenges the point of Marxist theory that capitalism in its primitive accumulation phase was not yet proper capitalism. As Robin D. G. Kelly writes of Robinson’s concept in the introduction to *Boston Review*’s issue on “Race, Capitalism and Justice”:

> Robinson challenged the Marxist idea that capitalism was a revolutionary negation of feudalism. Instead capitalism emerged within the feudal order and flowered in the cultural soil of a Western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism. Capitalism and racism, in other words, did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of "racial capitalism" dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism and genocide. Capitalism was "racial" not because of some conspiracy to divide workers or justify slavery and dispossession, but because racialism had already permeated Western feudal society. Robinson suggested that racialization within Europe was a colonial process involving invasion, settlement, expropriation, and racial hierarchy. The first European proletarians were *racial* subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma or Slavs, etc.), and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery *within Europe*. Indeed, Robinson suggested that racialization within Europe was very much a *colonial* process involving invasion, settlement, expropriation, and racial hierarchy.[8]

Kelly's reading of Robinson makes clear that there is no capitalism without colonialism. I, therefore, suggest that to critically assess the institutions built on the soil of colonialism and which perpetuate neoliberal global capitalism, we need to rethink the two main divisions mediated by decolonial theory and decolonization as analytical tools: the racial/colonial divide and the imperial/colonial divide.

The processes of racialization and discrimination are repetitive and continuous, and the relationship between labor and capital is violent and defines (neo-)liberal parliamentary democracy (which Achille Mbembe[9] speaks of as racial democracy) and its institutions. Moreover, today's capitalism and racism reinforce the transformation of all social, political, and economic relations in Europe. We see how well-rehearsed procedures that work in the West are being implemented in the East. The former Eastern European states resemble the White power regimes of their Western brothers, which quickly and brutally impose a merciless logic of hyper-neoliberalism on the entire territory. The understanding of these processes is important to the understanding of global politics, although the view

of some decolonial authors (e.g., Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo[10]) is that the former socialist countries in Europe are dysfunctional, archaic, and outdated, and therefore unable to develop a critical stance. Such a view resembles the post–World War II narratives when the Occident, instead of dealing with the Holocaust, and antisemitism and genocides of World War II, shifted the discourse as a struggle between democracy and totalitarianism. It is always a certain "Other" that is not worthy of consideration.

The Racial/Colonial Divide into World Geographies

The racial/colonial divide traverses and reorganizes two forms of capitalism: racial capitalism and settler capitalism. Sarah E. K. Fong theorizes them together, speaking of racial-settler capitalism "as an intervention into prevailing approaches to racial capitalism and settler capitalism."[11] She emphasizes "first, that the development of capitalist relations in the United States depended upon both the exploitation of racialized labor and the accumulation of Indigenous lands," and second, "how the violent relations of racial-settler capitalism are remade through attempts to cultivate consent and desire among African-descended and Indigenous peoples."[12] What is at stake in racial capitalism is the connection between labor and capital, whereas in settler capitalism it is the connection between land and capital.

For settler capitalism, the most important internal process is colonization; for racial capitalism it is racialization ("labor exploitation is indebted to theories of racial capitalism, which identify the fundamentally racial nature of labor exploitation").[13] As Fong argues, "Cedric Robinson's stratifications between labour and capital are organized by racial difference such that racialized lower classes provide the labour and resources necessary for the accumulation of wealth by the ruling classes. For Robinson, the term racial capitalism identifies the

imbrication of capitalist production and the differential valorization of racialized life."[14]

What is essential is that both the process of racialization and that of colonization do not leave out the social; on the contrary, for extraction and dispossession through racialization to work, the space of the social must also be racialized, blasted by racist and classist ideologies. These ideologies support and feed liberal individualism (that everything is "free" to exchange and therefore free to sell), and obscure the fact that democracy works exclusively through violence (democracy is only promoted and recalibrated through the constant use of violence). In 2015, Jodi Melamed emphasized the power of racial capitalism as an analytical tool on three levels: 1. In understanding "primitive accumulation—where capital is accrued through transparently violent means (war, land-grabbing, dispossession, neo/colonialism)"[15] while forming the basis of capitalist reproduction; 2. In seeing how the ideologies of individualism, liberalism, and democracy blossom from this very foundation and destroy any sense of community; and 3. In recognizing new forms of political activism that challenge these relations.[16]

Settler capitalism and settler colonialism are organized around the imposition of space over time, which means that the total dispossession of land by the necro-capitalist power structure and its violent supremacist regimes is central. In the context of the dispossession of Indigenous people, the ultimate goal is the destruction and elimination of the community, of the people. At the same time, capitalism cannot reproduce itself without the extraction of surplus value from racialized labor. Racialized labor exploitation and territorial expansion as accumulation through dispossession, Fong argues, constitute the liberal self, which is the object and tool of racial, colonial subjugation.[17]

The dynamics described in Figure 1, the 2021 diagram on "Capitalism and White Supremacy: Dominance Reproduction" by Marina Gržinić, illustrate the

exploitative global relations rooted in colonial and racist hierarchies.

Here I propose a detailed explanation of how these relations work.

Global World

North to South: extraction of capital from racialized labor

This flow represents the ongoing exploitation of the Global South by the Global North, a process deeply tied to the legacy of colonialism. Racialized labor—labor predominantly performed by people from historically colonized and marginalized regions—is systematically undervalued and exploited to create wealth for the Global North. This exploitation occurs through multinational corporations, resource exploitation, and supply chains that rely on low-wage labor in the South to maximize profits in the North. Examples include agricultural production, textile manufacturing, and mineral extraction, where laborers work in oppressive conditions for minimal pay.

The undervaluing of racialized labor is consistent with the profit-maximising imperatives of capitalism, which perpetuates the concentration of wealth in the global North while perpetuating poverty and dependency in the South. Through the racialization of labor, people in the Global South are classified as inherently "cheaper" or less valuable, reinforcing ideologies of white supremacy that dehumanize and commodify the "Other."

South to North: dispossession of land and elimination of the "Other"

This flow highlights how the global North benefits from the dispossession and erasure of communities in the global South, which are presented as obstacles to capitalist expansion and resource extraction. Land traditionally owned by indigenous or local communities is seized for agricultural, mining, or infrastructure

projects, often through legal or extra-legal means such as land grabbing, privatization, or forcible displacement. This reflects the colonial strategies of land grabbing under the guise of development or modernization. The “Other” refers to racialized, non-white populations that are seen as an obstacle to capitalist efficiency. This elimination is not always physical, but also includes cultural erasure, forced assimilation, and environmental destruction. For example, capitalist land use models replace traditional ways of life and knowledge systems, further marginalising these communities. Dispossession enables the extraction of natural resources and raw materials that fuel industries in the Global North, further enriching their economies and populations.

These two processes are not isolated, but closely interlinked:

- The wealth created by the extraction of capital from racialized labor (from North to South) is sustained by the continual displacement and elimination of communities in the South (from South to North).
- Dispossession ensures a constant supply of land and resources for exploitation, while the racialization of labor maintains the low costs necessary for capitalist profitability. This double flow reveals how capitalism and white supremacy work together to maintain global hierarchies. The Global North enriches itself at the expense of the Global South, while systemic inequalities are perpetuated along racial and geographic lines.

Europe

The dynamics that I have described for Europe in Figure 1, the 2021 diagram on “Capitalism and White Supremacy: Dominance Reproduction,” reflect a critical framework to examine the historical and contemporary socio-economic and political dynamics between Western and Eastern Europe. These lines can be interpreted as movements or flows of ideological, material, and structural developments that are influenced by broader colonial and imperialist structures. The dichotomy of West to East and East to West represents unequal exchanges and developments underpinned by capitalism and white supremacy.

Here's how these ideas can be unpacked in a European context:

West to East

1. Time/Technology. The movement from "West to East" symbolizes the imposition of Western ideas of progress, modernity and temporality on the East. Western Europe, having industrialized earlier and positioned itself as a technological pioneer, sees the East as "backward" in development and thus maintains a discourse of superiority. This dynamic maintains dependency through technology transfer under exploitative conditions and widens the gap between the "advanced" and the "catching up."
2. Property/hyper-privatization. After the collapse of the Eastern Bloc (1989), Western neoliberal ideologies have strongly influenced the privatization processes in Eastern Europe. Land, housing, and public property in the East were often sold to Western investors or oligarchs under the guise of modernization. This led to widespread dispossession and social inequality and reflected a colonial strategy of resource extraction and control.
3. Hyper-individualization/fascist mob. Western Europe's focus on neoliberal individualism breaks down collective identities and solidarities and creates fertile ground for reactionary movements. Hyper-individualization in the West is mirrored in the East's vulnerability to fascist mobs, where alienation and disenfranchisement are channelled into nationalist and xenophobic ideologies, exacerbating political polarization.

East to West

1. Time/Labor. Migration from the East of Europe to the West characterizes this flow, in which the West benefits from cheap, flexible and often precarious labor from the East. Time here means exploiting the labor force of Eastern Europe in order to secure the economic productivity and demographic needs of Western Europe. This reinforces the idea of the East as a reservoir of human capital for the West, trapped in an exploitative temporal relationship.
2. Land/hyper-destruction. Western industries and agribusiness have devastated the landscapes of Eastern Europe and exploited its natural resources. This hyper-destruction is a continuation of colonial practices where the land in the periphery is exploited to revitalize the economy in the West-European core. Examples of this include deforestation, monocultures, and mining to serve western markets.

3. Nationalism/fascist populism. As neoliberal globalization destroys traditional livelihoods and identities, nationalist movements are gaining momentum in the East. This nationalism is exported back to the West through populist discourses, where Eastern European ideologies of marginalization and ethno-nationalism meet Western far-right movements. The cyclical rise of fascist populism across the continent is undermining democratic institutions and exacerbating socio-political tensions.

In short, I can state, while in the West, time is technology, in the former East of Europe, time equals labor exploitation. In the West, space is only property, with total privatization; public space has disappeared. In the former Eastern Europe space is ruined, mismanaged, property plundered, and finally privatized through violent gentrification. At the same time, in Eastern Europe, instead of communities, we have only hyper-nationalism, while in the West, a populist mob of hyper-individualized subjects dominates. We need to address the former Eastern Europe after socialism in terms of racism, nationalism, and debt.

The Imperial /Colonial Divide into World Geographies

In this last section, I want to examine the claim of some decolonial positions (e.g. Madina Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo, who I referenced earlier in this text) that the elimination of socialism is a process of decolonization. Although I critiqued earlier in this article the equation of post-socialism with post-colonialism, this obfuscation (of the different posts) can be clarified by analysing the difference between the imperial and colonial divide.

In “Decolonization,” Seloua Luste Boulbina offers an analysis of the term for *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon* (2019). There, she develops a remarkable study of how to think decolonization.[18] She notes “that there is no conceivable decolonization without the *correlation* of a society’s political, economic, social,

and cultural dimensions, particularly on the post-colonial side."[19] She emphasizes the difference between post-colonial and "some sort of low-cost decolonization [that] is typically post-imperial."[20] The imperial, in such a low-cost reading, is "proper to the ancient metropolis and ancient societies, which apply the idea to objects rather than to social and political structures."[21] She asserts, "[p]olitically, the question extends distinctly on both sides of an imperial-colonial line that I wish to highlight, in order not to conflate problematics that are totally different."[22] This equation of the imperial/colonial divide places the imperial in relation to the periphery and not in relation to imperialism, which would be a clear postcolonial view; for the imperial/colonial divide takes place on the line of interest and power between the center and the periphery, but the colonial is not a question of center and periphery, but of imperialism. Imperialism is exploitation through colonization, with the use of military force, genocide, and the extraction of raw materials from colonies. Therefore, when we talk about "colonization" in Europe, in the former Eastern Europe we are instead talking about European "post-imperial" countries (former metropolises or peripheral cities), as opposed to "post-colonial" African countries (former colonies).

At this point, I return to Figure 1, my 2021 diagram "Capitalism and White Supremacy: Dominance and Reproduction," to delve deeper into its lower content, on "The Imperial/Colonial Divide." In the previous section, I focused on unpacking "The Racial/Colonial Divide." The Imperial/Colonial Divide invites exploration of the dynamics between imperial centers and their peripheries, and analysis of the intricate relationship between imperialism and colonialism.

For Luste Boulbina, decolonization captured by the imperial/colonial divide means that it "underwent a double displacement: on the one hand, from the metropolis to the colony and then from the colony to the metropolis; and, on the other hand, from the political field to the academic."[23] She believes that the idea of decolonization as a struggle has migrated into the academic sphere, into historiography. She explains that the French doctrine of the "colonial pact" was

based on an eloquent division: the metropolises were destined for industrialization, while the colonies had to supply raw materials.[24] As Luste Boulbina notes, "Decolonization was first a political notion, then a historiographical one."[25] She shows that this is a misunderstanding, since the imperial stands between the imperial center and the periphery, but decolonization means eliminating imperialism and colonization. Decolonization wants to destroy colonial imperialism.

Thus, Luste Boulbina argues that to understand the situation we have to differentiate between settler and modern colonies. She underlines that the situation of modern African countries is not comparable to that of the former colonies of the Americas. This is because the former slave colonies of the Americas are all based on a settler model, whereas the last "modern" colonies of Africa, with the exception of Algeria, are not settler colonies. Finally, she argues, the independent states of the Americas must also be distinguished from the independent states of Africa.[26] She holds that the,

> independence movements across the African continent benefitted the autochthonous populations, with the notable exception of South Africa, which only held its first "multi-racial" elections in 1994. In this continent, Algeria is the only former settler colony to have been entirely vacated of its European population. What is at stake in sovereignty is shaped to a large extent by the date of independence—those of the nineteenth century or the most recent ones achieved in the twentieth century—and by the presence or absence of Europeans.[27]

It is central, then, to see the post-imperial and the postcolonial through the postcolonial lens, and not through a semiotic analysis that conflates them. Decolonization is not about the historical philosophy of the imperial city exploiting the periphery but about the dismantling of imperialism, of capitalist colonialism. What happened in 1989 after the fall of the Berlin Wall is a typical post-metropolis situation that has brutally failed, what Lusta Boulbina calls low-cost decolonization. It is important to realize that this is reserved for the former

Eastern Europe. The low-cost decolonization of the rest of former Eastern Europe and Ukraine is typical of the old metropolises and, as Luste Boulbina suggests, relates primarily to the idea of objects, myths, and then to social and political structures. Serbia-Kosovo is in such a relationship today. So, when we talk about colonization in Europe, in former Eastern Europe we mean European post or former metropolises that exercise their power on the territory of what is called their periphery, and not post-colonial African or Asian countries (former colonies). What is crucial to understand is that the processes in former Eastern Europe are erroneously lumped together with the European colonial empires in Asia and Africa as well as in Latin America. An example that illustrates this is the current war in Ukraine, which is leading to destruction, and a necropolitical catastrophe for Ukraine and the EU, which in turn is a new extractivist territory for the dying US empire. These interests are the profit interests of the US military industry or the disposal of obsolete military technology (in Ukraine).

It is vital to reiterate here that decolonization means the abolition of colonization, of the exploitation of colonies for their raw materials. Low-cost decolonization is a view of the failed protagonists of industrialization. Lusta Boulbina is clear that decolonization is not the story of the imperial cities exploiting the periphery, but the dismantling of imperialism, that is, the termination of capitalist colonialism.

Conclusion

I have examined the connections and differences among post-socialism, post-colonialism, racialization, and capitalism, and their effects on vulnerable populations. I have conceptualized and analyzed a diagram depicting these connections and their evolution across the former East, West, North, and South regions over time. My argument asserts that to dismantle imperialism and bring an end to capitalist colonialism, it is imperative to reconsider both the racial/colonial divide and the imperial/colonial divide.

The diagram I have created to illustrate this and the histories exposed in this paper lead to a future of what to expect. Although today's relationship between the US and the EU is different, the logic remains the same. The EU has been turned into a provincial territory and an area for high-level US financing and extractivism. No one will yet claim that US financial interests have colonized the space. These relationships are now playing out between old friends of the West or newfound friends (turbo-nationalist former Eastern European states that are now part of the EU and antisemitic, like Hungary, or homophobic and patriarchal countries, like Slovenia and Poland), all united against the refugees. In this case, the low-cost decolonization in former Eastern Europe turns into an expensive one in Western Europe, but we could come to the point that the same logic exists between the metropolis (US) and the periphery (EU). The UK has always been part of this logic; it functions in the EU as a derivative instrument of the US imperial agenda.

I conclude by questioning whether the relationship between the US and the EU represents a new form of hyper-exploitation and devastation. The conflict in Ukraine has brought about human and ecological destruction in the European region, with bombings and toxins causing widespread devastation. There is mass displacement and loss of life, while the pursuit of green technology has been side-lined. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of commitment to protecting refugees from the Global South, including Africa and Asia, and the neoliberal discourse on human rights is rampantly repulsive. Ultimately, what we are witnessing is a new dynamic: a costly provincialization of Europe by the United States.

Acknowledgments

This article is a result of the research programme P6-0014 "Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy," and the research project J6-4623

“Conceptualizing the End: its Temporality, Dalectics and Affective Dimension,”which are funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

Notes

1. Marina Gržinić, “Theorizing Decoloniality in Southeastern Europe: Vocabularies, Politics, Perspectives,” in “Decolonial Theory & Practice in Southeast Europe,” ed. Polina Manolova, Katarina Kušić, and Philipp Lottholz, special issue, *Dversia*, no. 3 (2019): 168–93, https://dversia.net/4644/dversia-decolonial-theory-practice-southeast-europe/.

2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow-Sacrifice,” *Wedge* 7/8 (1985): 120–30.

3. Marina Gržinić, Tjaša Kancler, and Piro Rexhepi, “Decolonial Encounters and the Geopolitics of Racial Capitalism,” in “Breaking with Transition: Decolonial and Postcolonial Perspectives in Eastern Europe,” ed. Jeta Mulaj, Deniza Mulaj, and Jasmine Wallace, special issue, *Feminist Critique: Eastern European Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies*, no. 3 (2020): 13–38, https://feminist.krytyka.com/en/issues/feminist-critique-3-2020. The issue was prepared in collaboration with the Balkan Society for Theory and Practice.

4. See Madina Tlostanova, “Can the Post-Soviet Think? On Coloniality of Knowledge, External Imperial and Double Colonial Difference,” *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics* 1, no. 2 (2015): 38–58, https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v1i2.38 < https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v1i2.38> .

5. Nikhil Pal Singh, “On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation,” *Social Text* 34, no. 3 (2016): 27–50.

6. Singh, “On Race,” 33.

7. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

8. Robin D. G. Kelley, “What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?,” *Boston Review*, January 12, 2017, https://bostonreview.net/race/robin-d-g-kelley-what-did-cedric-robinson-mean-racial-capitalism < https://bostonreview.net/race/robin-d-g-kelley-what-did-cedric-robinson-mean-racial-capitalism> .

9. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019).

10. See Madina V. Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (The Ohio State University Press, 2012).

11. Sarah E. K. Fong, “Racial-Settler Capitalism: Character Building and the Accumulation of Land and Labour in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *American Indian Culture and*

Research Journal 4, no. 2 (2019): 27, https://doi.org/10.17953/aicrj.43.2.fong. ↩

12. Fong, "Racial-Settler Capitalism," 27. ↩
13. Ibid., 30. ↩
14. Ibid. ↩
15. Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 76, https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.1.1.0076 < https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.1.1.0076> . ↩
16. Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," 76. ↩
17. Fong, "Racial-Settler Capitalism," 27. ↩
18. Seloua Luste Boulbina, "Decolonization," *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, May 24, 2019, https://www.politicalconcepts.org/decolonization-seloua-luste-boulbina/ < https://www.politicalconcepts.org/decolonization-seloua-luste-boulbina/> . ↩
19. Luste Boulbina, "Decolonization." ↩
20. Ibid. ↩
21. Ibid. ↩
22. Ibid. ↩
23. Ibid. ↩
24. Ibid. ↩
25. Ibid. ↩
26. Ibid. ↩
27. Ibid. ↩

Author Information

Marina Gržinić

Marina Gržinić is a philosopher, theoretician, and artist, recognized as a leading contemporary figure in theoretical and critical thought in Slovenia. Since 1993, she has been a researcher at the Institute of

Philosophy, part of the Scientific Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC-SAZU). Currently, she serves as a Principal Research Associate at the Institute. In addition to her role in Slovenia, Gržinić has been a Full Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria, since 2003. Known for her extensive publications, global lectures, and critical engagement, she has been actively involved in video art since 1982.

View all of Marina Gržinić's articles.

Article details

Marina Gržinić, "Without Rethinking Colonialism and Racialization, a Sustainable Future is Not Possible," *Lateral* 13.2 (2024).

https://doi.org/10.25158/L13.2.12

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. Copyright is retained by authors.

Lateral is the peer-reviewed, open access journal of the Cultural Studies Association.

ISSN 2469-4053